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ABSTRACT

The Alternative Services To Raise Achievement (ASTRA) program at the Greater Hartford (Connecticut) Community College is designed to supply developmental and other services to students with academic potential who are in need of such services to complete their education. The program's structure is intended to meet the diverse needs of students; instructors meet students in large and small groups and also provide individual tutoring when needed. The program is divided into five phases. In the first, students are identified, tested, and selected for the program. Phase two provides an intense instructional program in developmental communication skills, while phase three provides an interdisciplinary coordination of these skills with a content area course. In phase four, a three-week period of study is provided for those students who require additional time to succeed. The final phase of the program is a tracking phase in which counselors monitor students' progress in their regular academic work through weekly seminars. There are two teams involved in the program, one for English speaking students and a second for bilingual students. In addition, there are composition laboratory services and a counseling support program. (FL)

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PROJECT ASTRA

Greater Hartford Community College

The ASTRA Program at Greater Hartford Community College is an alternative basic studies program in communications skills. In the first, of the two semesters, programs of Writing, Reading, Speaking, and English as a second language for the bilingual component of students, are coordinated and integrated so that similar objectives for each program are taught the same week. The fifteen objectives for each course interweave.

In the second semester, there is interdisciplinary arrangement with the communication courses of Composition, Speech, and Study Skills with a history course. The study skills and the history course are very strongly interwoven. The history course becomes the core course.

The ASTRA Program at Greater Community College is designed to provide special services to students, and is sponsored by the Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. ASTRA - an acronym for Alternative Services to Raise Achievement - supplies developmental and other special services to GHCC students with academic potential who are in need of such services as part of their college education.

The goal of this program is to increase the retention and graduation rates of these students.

ASTRA coordinates elements of developmental and college level courses, while providing an especially high level of services to insure educational success.

The structure of the ASTRA Program is intended to meet the diverse needs of students. Instructors meet students in large and small groups, and in-

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vidually, depending upon content of the courses and students' particular needs. Through class organization and teaching methods we attempt to offer optimum opportunities for learning.

ASTRA is monitored by the Office of Education, Department of HEW. In his site visitation meeting, the Special Services Program Officer, became acquainted with the goals and philosophy of Greater Hartford Community College, met with college faculty who have worked on the ASTRA Program, and reviewed the design of the project.

ASTRA was designed by three college staff professionals: a researcher, a Reading Specialist, and a counselor, all serving under the Dean of Faculty, Dr. Sally Oleon. There was coordination between the Humanities Division with the ASTRA program. A liaison committee from the English Faculty helped shape the curriculum, so that similar objectives in each of those disciplines were clearly defined. Also, a history instructor wrote the history curriculum.

An advisory Committee is in operation. This is a group of thirteen persons who have ties with the college, with cooperating colleges, and with the Black and Hispanic communities in Hartford.

The Program is divided into five phases. During Phase I, students are identified for the program, tested, and then selected. An assessment of the participants' strengths and weaknesses is made by the counselors assigned to the program.

Phase II provides an intense instructional program in developmental communications skills. Three hours a day, four days a week, are devoted to a transdisciplinary coordination of these skills.

In Phase III, this second semester provides an interdisciplinary arrangement of the communication skills with a content course integrated with communication courses to reenforce and expand the communication skills. Study skills are a strong component of the program.

In Phase IV, a three week period of study is provided only for those students who require additional time to succeed. During this time, a concentrated, highly individualized program is presented.

Phase V, in the third semester, is the "tracking phase". Counselors monitor students' progress in regular academic course work through weekly seminars. They may contact students' instructors and/or direct either peer or tutorial assistance. Counseling support continues with emphasis on job searching, resume writing, job interview techniques, and employer expectations.

ASTRA faculty members, counselors, and tutors work cooperatively as a team and share a strong commitment to each student's success and to the program. Weekly meetings help the staff to coordinate teaching efforts and to evaluate students' progress.

There are two teams: Team I, a Program for English speaking students; and Team II, the ESL Team, a Program for bilingual students. In addition, there are a Special Services Composition Lab and a strong Counseling support program. A strength of the program is the integrated and coordinated approach used in the total communication skills. For the student, success in college relies, to a very large extent, upon his ability to use language to express his ideas and to understand the thoughts of others.

The English speaking students are enrolled in a program of Composition, Reading, and Speech.. The English Faculty Liaison Committee organized the curriculum for each course according to fifteen objectives, one to be completed each week.

These objectives are arranged in a transdisciplinary manner in which learnings are presented and learned in one class, presented and repeated in a second course, and presented and reenforced in the third course. The methodology of teach, review, transfer, and reenforce seems to be a method needed and accepted well by many of the students in the ASTRA Program, and results in growth in total language development, natural reinforcement of skills and logical transfer to other skill areas. Meeting of classes four times a week instead of three is an added strength to the program. For students who need additional time for study, this extra hour means more classroom assistance. It also provides the many second-language people additional exposure to spoken English.

Another advantage of meeting four days a week is that more thorough testing can be done. Brief pre-tests are given at the beginning of each week or unit of study. After the material is covered, post-tests are then given. Later, a second chance of the Post-Test is given to students who fail the first one.

This testing routine is a strong point. First, this procedure causes teachers to organize material into relatively small units of study. Second, the unit pre-test gives the students a clear idea of what material will be covered on the next post-test. Third, giving frequent post-tests allows the students to see how much they have learned in a few days. Fourth, offering a second chance on a post-test gives them another opportunity to master the material.

In the second semester of the program there is also an interdisciplinary course arrangement. The student takes Western Civilization in addition to reading, Speech, and Composition. In the Reading class, students improve their reading and study skills by using the text from the content course. In the Composition course, students coordinate and integrate writing skills and do writing of

themes, answer to essay type questions, and a research paper. The research paper is the vehicle through which students learn their writing skills. In Speech, students talks are often based on the research and history content.

Another strength of the ASTRA Program is the provision for tutorial assistance. The tutors, who are trained and guided by the instructors, are utilized on a regular basis during class time and are available in the Learning Center during non-class hours.

Within the classroom, tutors usually perform two functions. One function is to serve as small group leaders. This provides an opportunity for the instructor to divide the class into groups during both instructional and skill practice periods. While the instructor is leading one group, the tutor is doing practices and activities with the other group. Therefore, varying levels of students' need can be met more effectively.

The second function occurs when tutors work with students on a one to one basis. The student benefits from the individual attention and encouragement he receives.

Team II is a program for Bilingual students for whom English is a second language. This group meets four days a week, and studies ESL daily for 75 minutes, and Reading and Composition, in a combined program, during the second time period.

There are two main goals of the ESL component of ASTRA, the academic and the counseling. The academic purpose is to teach the students grammatically correct English so that they can express themselves in writing. Students learn or review both grammar structures and meanings. They utilize and practice these same structures in the Reading and Composition classes. The goal is to immerse them in English through speaking, reading, and writing experiences.

Some ESL experts contend that even more important than the academic purpose is the instructor-counseling function. Students have a variety of health, social, job and economic crises that occupy their minds and time in and out of class. Instructors listen, counsel, and refer students to the professional counselors. For some, these classes are a link that help them understand and cope with the community and the college. The instructor-counseling aspect is a welcomed, essential, integral part of ASTRA.

During both semesters, counselors have frequent contact with instructors, both informally and at weekly staff meetings, in an attempt to stay abreast of any difficulties students might be encountering. Counselors meet with students individually and in groups to discuss personal, academic and career goals. Attendance problems are followed-up with telephone calls and home visits. Personal problems are resolved with referrals to community and state agencies or with continued counseling. Students with academic problems are referred to tutors and to the Learning Center.

Operating under the premise that the significant persons in each student's life often strongly influence the student's academic motivation, students and counselors planned a "family" event, in an attempt to strengthen the ties between the college and the student's family. The evening was a great success! Each student brought a favorite food or drink and families enjoyed entertainment in an evening of singing, dancing and gourmet delights.

During this disciplined program, students have established friendships, and developed a comraderie, gaining much support through the closely knit group spirit. Students, highly motivated, strongly committed to the program, and overcoming insurmountable academic, personal, and economic problems, have demonstrated through hard work that they can be successful in these courses and they want to continue with college work. They have developed a commitment

to themselves, to the program, to each other, and reciprocally to the staff. ASTRA is a carefully planned, innovatively designed program meeting the needs of students at Greater Hartford Community College.